DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 205 120 HE 014 146

AUTHOR Nelson, Kim; Lewis, John
TITLE The Evaluation of the College Graduate--Logic, Method and Findings. AIR Forum 1981 Paper.
PUB DATE May 81
NOTE 30p.; Paper presented at the Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research (21st, Minneapolis, MN, May 17-20, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Alumni; *Career Choice; *College Graduates; Cultural Activities; Employment Experience; Enrichment Activities; *Followup Studies; Graduate Study; Graduate Surveys; Higher Education; *Income; Political Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS *AIR Forum; *Winona State University MN

ABSTRACT

The extent to which graduates of Winona State University (WSU) Minnesota, attained their goals after college graduation was investigated, based on a survey mailed to all WSU graduates. Returns were obtained for 4,660 graduates, representing 33 percent of the total group. Survey results suggest the following conclusions: the vast majority of reporting graduates were employed in occupations classified as professional or technical/managerial; the reported incomes were low, probably a consequence of the large percentage of WSU graduates employed as teachers; attaining an advanced degree was reported for 19 percent of the graduates; most graduates voted, but did not become involved in most other political activities; the typical WSU graduate participated in three or four community activities and two or three intellectual or cultural activities; and in terms of social mobility, most graduates were first generation college graduates and most expected their children to complete at least an undergraduate education. Obtaining a master's degree (14 percent) was the most frequently reported advanced degree for WSU graduates. Another two percent reported earning an academic doctorate, and 1 percent earned a professional degree such as law, medicine, dentistry, or ministry. Additionally, two percent achieved an advanced certification without a degree such as certification to teach children with special learning disabilities. The most often reported community activities were church, professional groups and organizations, and PTA/school board. Other activities were reading nonfiction, listening to radio/TV concerts, attending plays or concerts, and visiting museums or galleries. Comparisons to studies at other universities are made. (SW)

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37

The Evaluation of the College Graduate-Logic, Method and Findings

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THE ASSOCIATION FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

This paper was presented at the Twenty-First Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research held at the Leamington Hotel in Minneapolis, Minnesota, May 17-20, 1981. This paper was reviewed by the AIR Forum Publications Committee and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC Collection of Forum Papers.

Mary Corcoran
University of Minnesota
(Editor, AIR Forum Publications)

23 A(1)

SUMMARY - ABSTRACT

This was a study of the extent to which graduates of Winona State University attained behaviors seen as goals of higher education. Data were collected via a survey schedule mailed to all graduates of WSU. Returns were obtained for 4,660 graduates which represented 33% of the total group. The results suggest the following conclusions:

1. The vast majority of reporting graduates were employed in occupations classified as professional or technical/ managerial.
2. The reported incomes were low, probably a consequence of the large percentage of WSU graduates employed as teachers.
3. Attaining an advanced degree was reported for 19% of the Winona graduates.
4. Most Winona graduates voted, but did not become involved in most other political activities.
5. The typical WSU graduate participated in 3 or 4 community activities and 2 or 3 intellectual or cultural activities.
6. In terms of social mobility, most Winona graduates were first generation college graduates and most expected their children to complete at least an undergraduate education.

Kim Nelson, Ph.D.
Executive Assistant to the President
Winona State University
8th and Johnson
Winona, Minnesota 55987
(507) 457-2018

John Lewis, Ph.D.
Chairperson, Department of Psychology
Winona State University
Winona, Minnesota 55987
(507) 457-2141

SECTION I:

LOGIC - THE NEED FOR EVALUATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A college or university exists for the purpose of achieving certain explicit and implicit goals which are usually expressed in the stated objectives of the university. To accomplish its objectives, the college selects specific tasks designed to stimulate the development of the desired attributes. These tasks are reflected in the curriculum and related activities. Upon their successful completion the students receive the college's formal approval.

In addition to selecting its objectives and designing a curriculum relevant for achieving these objectives, the college is obligated to make some assessment of its impact upon the students. Without this assessment, the college has no basis for judging the merits of its present curriculum or for planning future curricular revisions. Thus, the results from carefully planned evaluations of the achievements and activities of graduates from the college provide an indication of the effectiveness of its programs.

Evaluation of the college student is, therefore, a very necessary part of the educational process. This evaluation takes many traditional forms such as grading schemes, instruction ratings and extent of involvement in college activities. But these traditional forms of measuring the achievements of students represent only a part of the total appraisal of the effectiveness of the college's curricular and non-curricular programs, for they all take place while the students are still enrolled in the college. Behaviors expressed as desirable in most educational objectives pertain to the students' activities after they leave the college as well as their achievements as students. Therefore,

a complete program of evaluation should also include the systematic study of alumni accomplishments, for the ultimate purpose of the college is to leave a lasting impact on the behavior of its graduates. Thus, in order for a college to completely appraise the effectiveness of those programs designed to achieve its objectives, the college must be committed to systematic studies of the alumni. In other words, the college should evaluate the extent to which the graduates maintain the spirit of the college throughout their lives.

SECTION II

THE METHOD

In keeping with this logic, the suggested plan or methodology for conducting follow-up studies of college graduates would focus on the attainment of goals or objectives in the years after they graduate from the college. These goals or objectives may also be viewed as alumni achievements or activities thought to be related to the educational process, and hence, probably influenced by curricular and non-curricular processes. Alumni achievements reflect the extent to which the objectives of the college were fulfilled by the graduates.

Thus, the initial phase of a follow-up study is the development of a survey questionnaire schedule based upon the stated specific objectives of an institution of higher education or upon goals or objectives viewed as common to the over-all purpose of higher education and applicable to most majors in a multi purpose, regional university.

The latter rationale was utilized in the survey undertaken for graduates of Winona State University. While this institution does have a statement of goals or purposes, a more common listing of alumni achievements was used as a guide-

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line for survey item construction. Four common elements were selected:

1. Quality of vocational achievement included such factors as the level of income status level or type of the graduate's occupation, and extent of post-graduate academic and professional training.
2. Acceptance of responsibility in social groups consisted of involvement in political and community activities.
3. Further intellectual development focused on cultural and intellectual activities.
4. Social Mobility of Graduate and Family Members.

Several reasons can be cited for selecting these four alumni achievement variables. First, it was necessary to select only those variables which could be operationally defined. Numerous modes of behavior stated in objectives of colleges and universities are difficult, if not impossible, to be made operational. Secondly, the alumni behaviors investigated must be limited to those which can be measured by the methods of investigation available for this type of research namely the survey schedule. Ideally, each objective should be investigated by a method designed to be most appropriate for collecting data relevant to the objective. Such a varied and comprehensive procedure was beyond the financial resources of Winona State University and probably most colleges and universities. For this reason, data related to alumni achievements and activities were collected via a questionnaire. Restricting the data collection procedure to include only the survey questionnaire method also limited the numbers of alumni achievement variables open for investigation. For example, it would not be possible to assess objectives such as "the ability to solve problems involving quantitative thinking" or "strength of character."

Finally, the nature of the goals or achievement variables selected for inves-

tigation reflects a value judgment on the part of the authors as to the relative significance of the various kinds of alumni accomplishments. For research of this nature, it was not economically possible to include all alumni achievements which met the previous criteria. Thus, some alumni behaviors which could be operationally defined and assessed via the survey questionnaire method, but were of less immediate interest, were excluded.

The next step in the application of this logic to the measurement of alumni behaviors was to delimit these general goals or objectives into specific behaviors. That is, what behaviors represent involvement in political and community activities or what behaviors represent cultural and intellectual activities. Again, researchers are faced with value judgments as there are no known and accepted guidelines for making these determinations.

The final phase was that of developing question structure and specific questions relevant to each of the behaviors derived from the objectives and to combine them into an acceptable questionnaire schedule. A review of the items in the questionnaire used in the survey of WSU graduates (Appendix A) will demonstrate how the authors delimited the previously described objectives and corresponding alumni behaviors into specific questions for this particular study. It should be obvious to readers that other question forms or contents could be developed and used for collecting data pertaining to these objectives or to other relevant objectives as selected by various researchers.

Another issue which must be addressed is that of selecting a sample. There are several types of sampling procedures possible each with its particular good features and problems. Probably the most popular among pure research people is the random sampling procedure. A major advantage of the random method is that,

supposedly, a truly representative sample has been selected. Another advantage is that a relatively small group of graduates is ususally selected, which makes repeated mailings financially possible and thus increases the likelihood of a high percentage of returns. A major problem with the small, randomly selected group is that the absolute numbers of graduates surveyed, graduating from a given department or academic program within the college, may be too small to permit generalizations about this particular sub-group of graduates. This sampling procedure is further limited by providing data on too small a number of graduates to agencies within the college, such as the alumni office.

If those conducting the survey are particularly interested in selected groupings of graduates, then a stratified sampling procedure can be very desirable. The major difficulty with this approach is that of deciding upon the nature of the various samples of graduates. This has to be done prior to mailing of the questionnaires. Once determined, one has to live with any second thoughts about previous judgments.

For the survey of WSU graduates, it was decided to survey the total group of graduates. This decision resulted in a large mailing of over 14,000 which provided data for a relatively large number of graduates (4,661 return). Looking at this positively, the survey provided data for a large number of graduates which will be of great value to several campus agencies. The major drawback with this approach is that it reduces the ability to generate a larger percentage of returns since repeated mailings are usually not possible for financial reasons.

REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

This paper describes the logic and application of a model used for the study of postgraduate achievements of alumni of Winona State University. The model was also employed for the investigation of a select group of liberal arts graduates from the University of Iowa (Lewis, 1970). This suggested approach was based upon delimiting specific objectives of a college or implicit objectives of higher education. This section will describe other models or methods used or suggested for studying the outcomes of higher education.

It is observed, unfortunately, that many survey studies of college alumni are developed without any apparent logic or rationale. It would appear as if the questions to be asked were selected merely because "we might be interested in knowing that." While these kinds of data may indeed be worthwhile to various agencies or persons within a given college, they are limited in providing information relevant to the basic theories and assumptions underlying the whole process of higher education.

Another approach is to develop a rationale for questionnaire items by examining theoretical arguments as proposed by leading writers in higher education or related fields. An example of this procedure was the study of graduates from the public institutions of higher education in Tennessee (Braun, 1977). The survey instrument utilized in this study was, in part, based upon areas of graduates' attainments and behaviors delimited from elements seen as the role of higher education in the lines of graduates as projected by several writers.

One of the best summaries of appropriate logical schemes has been presented by Astin (1970). He described three basic procedures: environmental measurement, between-college measure, and within-college measure. With the environ-

mental approach, efforts would be made to compare graduates of different colleges to determine how they varied on specific behaviors or achievements. The underlying assumption was that colleges provided variation in student environments and thus should result in different postgraduate behaviors. The between-college measure approach utilized more precise measuring procedures. They included instruments developed to measure defined characteristics of college environments. Examples of these techniques included the College Characteristics Index (Pace, 1963; Stern, 1963), the College and University Environmental Scales (Pace, 1960, 1963), the Environmental Assessment Techniques (Astin and Holland, 1961) and the Inventory of College Activities (Astin, 1968). The within-college measure procedure focused on relating experiences or activities during the college years with activities and achievements as graduates. The measuring devices employed were typically questionnaires mailed to the graduates.

An examination of survey procedures utilized in the past decade have shown an increased interest in the model of "student satisfaction" as a guide in the appraisal of the effectiveness of the college or university. These questionnaires were constructed with the apparent goal of determining the extent to which graduates liked, or were satisfied with, various aspects of their college experience and professional training. Usually included were questionnaires pertaining to quality of courses, counseling services, advising systems, completeness of the curriculum, and a variety of things which the colleges "should have done, but didn't." A more systematic application of this logic was reported by Feild and Giles (1980). These authors developed a scale called the Graduate Student Satisfaction Questionnaire designed to measure graduate student satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their respective graduate programs. Directing the follow-up study towards the graduates' feelings of satisfaction

toward their alma mater is reflected in the survey schedule now being offered by the American College Testing Program to colleges and universities as a part of their services. It is also reflected in the majority of surveys examined by these authors which have been completed for NCATE evaluations of the quality of teacher training programs.

This concern with alumni satisfaction probably reflects the current dilemma facing higher education. The 1960's saw an unparalleled growth in the size of institutions of higher education in this country. The 1970's was a decade marked by an effort to maintain these large enrollments. During the 1980's, colleges are expected to wage an all-out struggle to prevent enrollment decreases. Apparently, many people in higher education have judged the degree of student satisfaction as a major variable of concern in this mounting struggle to maintain enrollments.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This section will describe the results found from the investigation of the alumni behaviors of Winona State Graduates. The number and percentages of returned questionnaires from majors in nine academic areas at Winona State University are shown in Table I.

It can be seen that the largest percentage of the total returns came from majors in education with 37.3% and business and industry with 20.8%. This high percentage from education reflects the past role of WSU being primarily a teacher training institution. In more recent years, the number of majors, and hence graduates, in business and industry have increased dramatically. Since the findings from this survey are reported for the total group, the influence of these percentages should be considered as they probably reflect on

other outcomes.

The first specified objective or goal was quality of vocational achievement as measured by level of income, status level of the occupation, and extent of post-graduate academic and professional training. The level of the current occupations reported by the graduates is reported in Table 2. These occupations were classified according to the scheme used for the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT).

Half of the graduates (49.9%) reported occupations classified as professional by the DOT system. It should be pointed out that teachers - the largest category of majors in terms of returned questionnaires - are considered professional according to the DOT. The second largest category was technical-managerial occupation with 19.7% - a reflection of the large number of returned questionnaires from WSU business majors. Of interest was the 1.1% reported. Do they represent a sign of the economic times? The 8.7% response indicating "retired" was a consequence of the questionnaire being mailed to all living graduates.

In our society, the role of higher education is to provide for human development as fostered through liberal education and to train students to enter occupations considered to be high in prestige. It is thus expected that most graduates would be employed in jobs generally considered to be professional or managerial. (Lewis, 1969; Pace, 1941, Havemann & West, 1952).

The nature of the job classification system should be given consideration in the interpretation of occupational level data from different studies. The DOT system places those in teaching and teaching-related jobs as "professional" or in level one. In comparison, Lewis (1970) used the occupational classifi-

cation system developed by Anne Roe (1956) which lists teachers as being in level two.

The incomes reported by the graduates can be seen in Table 3.

The largest frequency of reported income was the $10,000 - $15,999 category with 28.9% of the respondents. Summing the percentages in the three categories - $10,000 or less, $10,000 - 15,999 and $16,000 - 19,999 - reveals value of 70.2%. This finding suggests that a majority of WSU graduates earn incomes in the lower level for those in professional occupations. Again, this finding was probably influenced by the large percentage of graduates employed in education, a relatively low-paying occupation.

The quality of vocational achievement as expressed through the extent of advanced training is shown in Table 4.

Obtaining a master's degree (14%) was the most frequently reported advanced degree for WSU graduates. Another 2% reported earning an academic doctorate with another 1% earning a professional degree such as law, medicine, dentistry or ministry. In addition, 2% achieved an advanced certification without a degree such as certification to teach children with special learning disabilities.

Although a difference in times may be a confounding factor, these data suggest that a smaller percentage of B.A. or B.S. graduates from WSU completed a graduate degree when compared with those from Kansas State University (Cross, 1960) and the University of Iowa (Lewis, 1970). Since different types of institutions attract students with different average potentials for academic success, it would be interesting to determine if there is an interaction among

level of academic ability, type of undergraduate institution, and the attaining of graduate degrees. Another factor is the sex of the graduates. The results of the Iowa study showed large sex differences on this measure of alumni behaviors. While the percentage of Iowa male graduates earning an advanced degree was high (nearly 50%), the percentage of female Iowa graduates completing an advanced degree was very close to the figure for WSU graduates.

The second goal of higher education under investigation was the degree of acceptance of responsibility in social groups as indicated by involvement in political and community activities. The results for questions pertaining to involvement in political activities are reported in Table 5.

The most encouraging finding was that over half (52.1%) of the WSU graduates reporting indicated voting "all of the time" with another 33% marking "much of the time". Less encouraging for a nation based on democratic participation was the finding that over 9 of 10 graduates never ran for public office nor were ever appointed to a public office.

These findings are similar to those reported in previous investigations. Lewis (1970) found that very few Iowa graduates reporting direct involvement in the basic political process. Pace (1941) (1949) reported that although many of the graduates appeared highly interested in certain very significant social problems and felt a need for more information about them, their participation in social and civic affairs was limited to quite routine matters.

Voting behaviors were also found to be rather similar. Pace (1949) found that 79% of his survey graduates reported a regular habit of voting. The slightly higher figure for WSU graduates - 85% reporting voting all or much of the time - may reflect the large percentage of education majors in the WSU

sample. Evidence from many sources suggest that teachers are "solid citizens."

The percentage of graduates reporting involvement in various community activities can be seen in Table 6.

The most often reported community activities were church, (19.7%), professional groups and organizations (17.7%) and PTA, school board (10.8%). The total numbers of community activities reported by the 4,661 graduates was 15,553 for an average of 3.34.

Again, the behaviors of Winona graduates seemed similar to that reported in other studies, Lewis (1970) found the high frequency of male Iowa graduates to be in the 3-4 category with 1-2 being the most often reported number of community activities for female Iowa graduates. Although the influence of the area academic major was not considered in the Winona study, Lewis (1970), and Havemann & Webb (1952) reported significant differences among graduates with various academic training.

The third area of investigation was extent of continued intellectual development data reflecting on this outcome is shown in Table 7.

Activities with relatively high extent of participation were reading nonfiction (22.9%), listening to radio/TV concerts (18.8%), attending plays or concerts (15.5%), and visiting at museums or galleries (10.9%). In terms of a common figure, the 4,661 graduates reported involvement in 12,840 cultural/intellectual activities for an average of 2.76.

Differences appeared when the extent of intellectual development for Winona graduates was compared with Iowa (Lewis, 1970) and Minnesota graduates

(Pace, 1941). Although the data from these three studies have been presented in different forms, which prevents exact comparisons, apparent differences do suggest that the extent of involvement in intellectual and cultural activities for Winona graduates was substantially lower. One can speculate as to the factors which cause these differences. These would include socio-economic class differences of the students prior to entering college, the press for cultural and intellectual participation while on campus, the opportunity for cultural and intellectual involvement at different campuses, and the function or purpose of their education as seen by the student.

Possibly the most significant goal studied was social mobility of the graduates and family members. The findings for this variable are shown in Table 8.

Several noteworthy results are revealed. Similar to the findings regarding the graduates from the Tennessee public institutions (Braun, 1977), most WSU graduates are first generation college or university graduates. Reference to Table 8 shows that only 4.1% of the graduates' fathers and 5% of their mothers completed a final degree in higher education. It is interesting to note that the graduates' mothers were better educated than were their fathers.

Also, these graduates want and expect their own children to undertake and complete formal higher education. Only 10 - 15% of these graduates reported satisfaction with high school, vocational, or community college education for their children. The rest reported an expectation of college or university graduation, or graduate and professional school completion.

Finally, the sex differences which appeared in these expectations are

noteworthy. Reference to Table 8 reveals that 57% reported an expectation of college graduation for male children and 62% for female children, and 31% reported graduate or professional school for male children and 28% for female children. In a particular sense, these differences were small and would lead one to conclude that parental expectations for their children's higher education were not influenced by the sex of the child. However, chi-square tests yielded values statistically significant at the .05 level. This finding was undoubtedly due to the high reliability of differences produced by the large N's. Thus, a reader could refer to the small obtained difference and argue no practical significance, or one could emphasize the statistically significant finding and argue that the graduates expected a higher level of formal education for male children than for female children.

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Table I

Numbers and Percentage of Majors From Nine Areas Returning Completed Questionnaires

	N	%
Education	2,141	37.3
Business/Industry	1,191	20.8
Natural/Applied Sciences	659	11.5
Arts/Humanities	624	10.8
Social Science	620	10.8
HPER	447	7.8
Nursing	253	4.4
Ind. Study	31	.53
Pre/Library, etc.	17	.29

Table 2

Graduates' Occupational Level (N= 4,587)

	N	%
Professional	2,289	49.9
Tech/Managerial	903	19.7
Service	420	9.2
Retired	399	8.7
Clinical/Sales	364	7.9
Other	166	3.6
Unemployed	48	1.1

Table 3

Graduates Level of Income (N = 4,314)

	N	%
10,000 - 15,999	1,247	28.9
10,000 or Less	981	22.7
16,000 - 19,999	801	18.67
20,000 - 24,999	636	14.7
25,000 - 29,999	278	6.4
35,000 - 50,000	146	3.4
30,000 - 34,999	125	2.9
50,000 & above	100	2.3

Table 4

Extent of Advanced Training

	N	%
Master's Degree	660	14
Advanced Certification	101	2
Ph.D. or Equivalent	95	2
Professional School	28	1

Table 5

Responses to Questions Pertaining to Involvement in Political Activities

		N	%
Running For Public Office	Never Ran	4,315	93.3
	Elected	233	5.0
	Ran but not elected	77	1.7
Appointed to Public Office	No	4,349	94.0
	Yes, in past	136	3.0
	Yes, Currently	130	2.8
Do You Vote	All of the Time	2,419	52.1
	Much of the Time	1,532	33.0
	Some of the Time	504	10.9
	Rarely	185	4.0

Table 6

Involvement in Community Activities

Activity	N	%
Church	3,057	19.7
Prof. Groups/Organizations	2,755	17.7
PTA, School Board	1,677	10.8
United Fund Drive, Red Cross	1,523	9.8
Civic Groups or Service Clubs	1,413	9 1
Public Service/Volunteer	1,292	8.3
Boy/Girl Scouts, 4H	1,125	7.2
Other	670	4.3
YM/YWCA	666	4.3
Lodge Member	569	3.7
Labor Organizations	509	3.2
Chamber of Commerce	292	1.9
	15,553	

Table 7

Involvement in Cultural & Intellectual Activities

Activity	N	%
Read non-fiction	2,944	22.9
Listen to radio/TV Concerts	2,397	18.7
Attend Plays or Concerts	1,991	15.5
Visit at Museums or Galleries	1,403	10.9
Attend Lectures or Forums	1,058	8.2
Play Musical Instrument	946	7.4
Collect/play classical/jazz recordings	888	6.9
Other	453	3.5
Paint or Sketch	418	3.3
Write (prose or verse)	342	2.7

Table 8

Indications of Social Mobility

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION OF PARENTS

	FATHER		MOTHER	
	N	%	N	%
Grade School	1,934	21.0	1,371	14.9
High School Graduate	1,220	13.3	1,715	18.6
Some College	438	4.8	597	6.5
Vocational Training	313	3.4	268	2.9
Community or Jr. College Grad.	45	.5	107	1.2
College/University Graduate	377	4.1	458	5.0
Grad. or Professional School	264	2.9	95	1.0

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION EXPECTED FOR CHILDREN

	BOYS		GIRLS	
	N	%	N	%
High School Graduate	57	2.0	48	1.0
Some College	104	4.0	121	4.0
Vocational Training	200	6.0	147	4.0
Community or Jr. College Grad.	51	2.0	68	2.0
College/University Graduate	1,949	57.0	2,091	62.0
Graduate or Professional School	1,040	31.0	942	28.0